

Lessons in Mindfulness



Supporting the practice of serious martial artists

Lessons in Mindfulness



Body, Mind, and Spirit

*The study of martial arts is a path of personal growth, encompassing body, mind and spirit. **The Lessons in Mindfulness** program is designed to support and supplement your physical practice, to motivate you and inspire you on ever deeper levels.*

**Reading and talking
is not enough. You
must do the work.
The only person
who can change
you is you.**

Topic

Achieving Mastery

A strong body plus a strong mind equals a strong future. The ability to focus and harness willpower is the real key to great success and happiness. Choosing to join this program of introspection and discipline makes you a unique and special person. Few people make the effort to reach their highest potential.

In this lesson, you will learn the seven principles necessary to become a great martial artist. Some of the principles might seem basic, while others might be new concepts. These seven principles are universal truths. They will guide your practice, and by learning to apply them to other areas of life, you will be much happier and more successful.

1. Find a good teacher

The first step to take after deciding to pursue the study of any subject should be to find a person who has already accomplished greatness in that field. Do not waste time trying to, “reinvent the wheel.” You can learn many topics from books, videos, the internet, etc. To effectively study martial arts, though, you must be face to face with a teacher. The other resources can supplement the process, but real learning happens on the floor, through trial and error and personal experience.

**A strong body plus a strong mind
equals a strong future**

Because this is such a logical first step, why don't most of us first consult those who have walked the path ahead of us before starting a new endeavor? The biggest reason is we are excited to be starting something new. We can't wait to begin. Another reason is that we fear that by consulting others, our creative juices will be stifled. Lastly, we just don't want to share the credit for the accomplishment. We want to feel like we did everything on our own. Our ego makes us believe that climbing a mountain with a guide cannot possibly be as satisfying as climbing solo.

A great teacher enhances learning, helping you to get the skills you need as fast as possible. With enough practice, you will reach a point where you no longer struggle with the basic techniques. When you have mastered technique, you have the freedom to become an artist. Remember, you must be a great technician before you can be an artist.

2. Patience

After you have found a great teacher, the next requirement is to be patient. Our society demands immediate gratification. The quicker the better! We have blazing fast internet connections and powerful microwaves to cook our food faster. We can even buy peanut butter and jelly in the same jar, to optimize our sandwich-making experience! Impatience is an epidemic in our culture.

We despise slow beginnings, but the true study of martial arts takes time. You must be patient; you are not going to master your techniques quickly. You won't get into shape overnight. Impatience is the number one reason why people quit their practice. We are a society with short attention spans. People quit activities at the drop of a hat. In any field, find the person who is at the top. The master of any discipline has immense staying power. They could not have reached the heights of greatness without patience.

If you are not living the way that you want to live, what must you change to make your life exactly as you want it to be?

When practice becomes inconsistent, making excuses for staying away becomes easier.

There once was a farmer who purchased a very expensive seed with the hope that it would grow into a beautiful fruit tree. He found the perfect place in his garden where the soil was fertile and the sun and shade would be just perfect. He took care to water his seed regularly. Every day, the farmer dreamed of picking delicious juicy fruit from his strong and beautiful tree. Shortly after planting, he became curious about the progress of his seed as he had seen no sprout break through the earth. Just to make sure that everything was going well, he dug up the seed and carefully inspected it for growth. Slightly disappointed but still hopeful, he replanted his precious seed. He continued to water the spot each day, making plans for the future of his harvest. A few more days passed, and again his impatience got the best of him. He decided to dig up the seed and take another look. This cycle continued for several more days. As you have probably guessed, the seed, which held such enormous potential for growth and greatness withered away and died.

Do not let your practice die under the weight of over examination. Learn to be patient.

3. Perseverance

At first glance, perseverance might seem the same as patience, but they are different principles. Perseverance means that you practice regularly. You come to class two to three times a week consistently.

A student was coming to class only 2 or 3 times a month. His teacher asked him about his inconsistent attendance, and he responded with a smile, “Sir, I am patient. I plan to practice for the rest of my life, so I am not in a hurry.” His teacher explained that patience is a great quality, but skipping classes slows progress. When practice becomes inconsistent, making excuses for staying away becomes easier. The most successful long-term students are those who stick to a consistent weekly routine from the very beginning—no excuses!

4. Practice Hard

Prepare to push yourself—body and mind. During class, you will sweat, and push your body to its limits. Mentally focus on your techniques with such intensity, that you have no room for any of the day-to-day problems and frustrations you might have brought with you.

With effort, you will begin to break through physical limitations. You will begin to feel more confident, and your new assurance will carry over into other areas of your life. When you train your body and mind together, you are preparing to take on life and its challenges. Cultivate an attitude of discipline and concentration in class. Don’t allow yourself to focus on anything else but your practice. Drop the outside world at the door. With a break from your regular life, a clearer, more objective perspective will come into view. You’ll be able to see solutions to your problems with fresh eyes.

A serious martial artist cultivates mindfulness in all phases of his life.

In class and in daily life, frequently ask yourself, “Am I practicing exactly what I want to perform?”

5. Practice exactly what you want to perform

As human beings, our nature is to like what comes easy to us, and to shy away from things that are hard. Success makes us feel good. The same is true in martial arts. After several months of practice, you might begin to gravitate toward your favorite moves. You do them fairly well, and you feel successful. Other techniques will still be difficult and this is normal. Excelling in some areas and finding others more challenging is to be expected. But to become a well-rounded martial artist, you will need to execute all of the techniques in the curriculum. Keep challenging yourself.

Use this principle as a compass to guide you to your highest performance in the rest of your life. Frequently ask yourself, “Am I practicing exactly what I want to perform?” Maybe you need to manage your time better, so that you are more productive at work. Look at your relationships with others. Which are fulfilling and which are frustrating? Are you doing everything that you can to make your life work in the best way possible? Your life is not a dress rehearsal—this is the real thing. If you are not living the way that you want to live, what must you change to make your life exactly as you want it to be?

Remember, if the highest goal is a joyful satisfying life, practice what you want to perform. Smile often. Laugh and have fun. Find solutions, rather than focusing on problems. Practice being happy and you will find happiness.

A serious martial artist sees his practice as a path leading to greater awareness, concentration and patience—with himself and others.

6. Mindfulness

So you've found a good teacher, you've been patient and perseverant, and you've worked out hard, and you are trying to practice what you want to perform. By diligently following these first five steps, you can learn to defend yourself well, and you will get in great shape. But these accomplishments do not make you a true martial artist.

The primary difference is that a serious martial artist sees his practice as a path leading to greater awareness, concentration and patience with himself and others. He believes that his practice is more than just physical movements, and he cultivates mindfulness in all phases of his life.

Introspection and self-analysis are important techniques to the martial artist. In other words, reading about philosophy, and discussing the subject is not enough. You must do the work. The only person who can change you is you. Change does not happen overnight, but incrementally on a day-to-day basis. In the activity and the technique sections of this lesson, you will be given the real work. Complete the assignments and practice the techniques. In doing so, you are choosing to take your practice and your life to the next level.

7. Passion

The final principle in becoming great at anything is passion. You must love what you are doing. Martial arts develops discipline, but no one can reach greatness through pure discipline alone. You must love your practice so much that you embrace it with great passion. Many masters in different styles began with feeble bodies and difficult physical challenges. Their passion for their practice kept them coming to the dojo. Unfortunately in our busy society, few people set up their lives, to consistently include an activity that brings them immense pleasure and joy.

You need something to live for and something to die for. You are very fortunate if they are one and the same.

**To win one hundred
victories in one
hundred battles is
not the highest skill.
To subdue the enemy
without fighting is
the highest skill.**

—Sun-tzu

A great master said, “You need two things in life, something to live for and something that you will die for. You are very fortunate if they are one and the same.”

Passion plays an immense role in the quality of your life and your happiness. You simply must find something, which feeds you and completes you each day. Maybe the beginners are thinking, “Whoa, slow down, I just came in for some classes. I don’t know that I love this yet.” To become a great martial artist, or for that matter, great at anything, you must learn to love what you are doing! If you are new to the practice, just concentrate on having fun. Enjoy your time in class and be enthusiastic. Slowly the passion will develop.

Activity

Read the book, *Zen in the Martial Arts* by Joe Hyams. This book is a terrific introduction to martial arts. Within its pages are many universal truths to help you see your practice from a different perspective. Some of the key chapters will be “Do Not Disturb,” “Lengthen Your Line,” and “Mushin.”

Choose your favorite chapter, and write a paragraph to a page explaining what you liked about it.

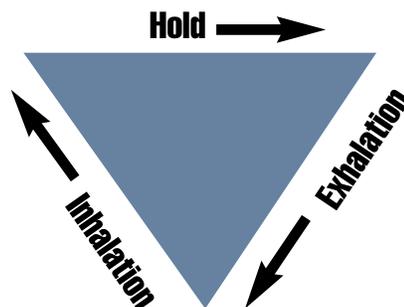
When you have completed the activity, keep a copy of your work for future reference and make a copy to turn in to your instructor.

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Technique: Triangular Breathing

Now that you have practiced diaphragm breathing, you may recognize that your inhalations and exhalations are not the same length. This is normal. Triangular breathing helps to equalize the breath.

- Start by kneeling in seiza, or sitting on the floor with your back straight and your chin parallel to the floor. You may also sit with crossed legs, or in a full lotus or a half lotus, or in a straight back chair with your feet on the floor. Pick a comfortable posture, which allows the spine to stay straight and relaxed.
- Exhale. Begin to inhale slowly and consistently without breaks or pauses. Fill the lungs completely from the bottom up to the top and then hold the breath. End with a slow exhale from the top of your chest down.
- In triangular breathing, the goal is make the durations of the inhalation of the breath, the holding of the breath, and the exhalation of the breath, exactly the same. Breathe as slowly as possible, concentrating on balancing the three parts of the technique.



Key Points:

- Do not practice breathing techniques on a full stomach. Wait one hour after eating to practice.
- Always inhale through the nose—never the mouth. This might irritate your throat. Exhalation can be through the nose or the mouth.
- The inhalation, hold, and exhalation is counted as one cycle. Practice triangular breathing 6-12 times, before practicing diaphragmatic breathing. Practice 6-12 times daily. If you find that your breath during diaphragmatic breathing is equal, you might still choose to practice triangular breathing.

Benefits:

The benefits are better control of the breath, a calmer, less stressful attitude, and greater mental clarity and focus.

**Control your
emotion or it will
control you.**

—Chinese saying

Thought is the blossom;
language the bud;
action the fruit behind.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Glossary

Seiza

Kneeling posture traditionally used in Japan for showing respect. Sitting in seiza while meditating allows the practitioner to keep the spine straight.

Full lotus

Sitting posture widely used in India. The right foot is turned up on the left thigh and the left foot is turned up on the right thigh. This is a very stable posture that allows the spine to be straight, but it demands a certain amount of flexibility to sit comfortably.

Half lotus

Sitting posture with the right foot turned up on the left thigh and the left leg is tucked under the body. This posture is easier than a full lotus and the practitioner can switch legs to reduce discomfort.

Introspection

Introspection is self-examination-taking the time to truly look at yourself. Notice your motivations, actions and thoughts. Be honest about yourself and your life.

Dojo

This term has been translated in many different ways. On the simplest level, a dojo can be a training hall, studio or gym. This is a very basic translation that can only be excused if used by beginners. A deeper and more accurate translation would be “place of the way.” On the most profound level, the word dojo means, “place of enlightenment, place where one is transformed (where the ego is transformed).” A dojo is a place of realization and inspiration.

Recommended Reading

- *Highly recommended*

- * *Kodo Ancient Ways*—Kensho Furuya
The Karate Dojo—Peter Urban

**A man who has
attained mastery of
an art reveals it
in his every action.**

—Samurai Maxim

Notes